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ABSTRACT

This learning activity package (LAP) titled Characteristics of Disadvantaged Learners is one of a series designed to develop competencies needed by vocational teachers working with disadvantaged students. Each LAP concentrates on one general vocational teacher competency and contains the following sections: an introduction, a teacher competency sheet, an information section, worksheets, and evaluation devices. The introduction describes the purpose and directions for using the booklet. The teacher competency sheet identifies the unit, competency, performance objective, learning activities and vocabulary to guide the learning of the vocational teacher. Information sheets and alternative print and nonprint media present content pertaining to the competency. A test is provided to check the teacher's comprehension of the information presented. Worksheets provide application of the content and a final evaluation instrument permits an assessment of the vocational teacher's performance. (LRA)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

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This publication has been reviewed in compliance with Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Public Law 94-482, Title II of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976 for the elimination of sex bias, sex discrimination, and sex-role stereotyping.

PREFACE

This booklet is one of a series designed to assist vocational educators with disadvantaged learners. The series was designed to develop competencies needed by vocational teachers working with disadvantaged students.

Each booklet is a learning activity package (LAP) that concentrates on one general vocational teacher competency. An introduction, a teacher competency sheet, an information section, worksheets and evaluation devices are included. The introduction describes the purpose and directions for using the booklet. The teacher competency sheet identifies the unit, competency, performance objective, learning activities and vocabulary to guide the learning of the vocational teacher. Information sheets and alternative print and nonprint media present content pertaining to the competency. A test is provided to check the teacher's comprehension of the information presented. Worksheets provide application of the content and a final evaluation instrument permits an assessment of the vocational teacher's performance. With certain LAPs, extended activities have been included to permit interested teachers to go beyond the minimum competency level.

The LAPs in the series are as follows:

1. Characteristics of Disadvantaged Learners
2. Disadvantaged Learner Referral Process
3. Diagnostic Assessment of Disadvantaged Vocational Learners
4. Disadvantaged Learner Analysis Profile
5. Occupational Cluster Analysis for Disadvantaged Vocational Learners
6. School and Community Resources for Disadvantaged Learners
* 7. Instructional Materials for Disadvantaged Learners
* 8. Learning Activities for Disadvantaged Learners
* 9. Disadvantaged Learner Vocational Plan
* 10. Classroom Management for Disadvantaged Learners
* 11. Disadvantaged Vocational Learner Progress Evaluation
* 12. Competency-Based Vocational Teacher Education on Disadvantaged Learners: User's Manual

* Booklets 7-12 are under development and are projected to be ready for dissemination in October 1980.

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Perry R. Gemmill
Project Director

INTRODUCTION

Disadvantaged learners have been historically referred to as slow learners, mentally disabled, potential dropouts and culturally deprived. Today, these labels are not completely appropriate.

The purpose of this learning activity package (LAP) is to: (a) define the term, "disadvantaged learner," (b) identify the characteristics of disadvantaged learners and (c) facilitate the identification of disadvantages and strengths of a selected disadvantaged student.

A suggested procedure for using this LAP is to review the entire Teacher Competency Sheet. If you then feel that you need additional information about the characteristics of disadvantaged vocational learners, perform the learning activities starting with the information section. However, if you think that you can achieve the performance objective, complete the worksheets and rate your performance.

TEACHER COMPETENCY SHEET

UNIT 1.00:

Assessing Disadvantaged Vocational Learners

COMPETENCY 1.01:

Identify characteristics of disadvantaged learners.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

Given information on the definition and characteristics of disadvantaged learners, identify and describe relevant instructional characteristics of a disadvantaged vocational learner. A checklist will be used to rate your performance. All items must be rated as acceptable.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

1. Read Information Section I on the "Definition and Characteristics of Disadvantaged Learners."

2. (Optional) Examine references listed in the Reference Section of the User's Manual having specific information on the characteristics of the disadvantaged learner.

3. (Optional) View the film "Cipher In The Snow" and complete the reaction sheet.

4. Test Your Knowledge by completing the section, "Definition and Characteristics of Disadvantaged Learners."

5. Compare your Local Education Agency (LEA) definition and eligibility criteria of the disadvantaged learner with the federal definition. Record your comparison on Worksheet I, "Definition and Eligibility Criteria Comparison."

6. Observe a disadvantaged learner in a vocational education program and identify this person's characteristics on Worksheet II, "Disadvantaged Learner Characteristics Rating Scale."

7. Using data recorded on the characteristics rating scale, describe the disadvantaged vocational student on Worksheet III, "Disadvantaged Learner Description."

8. Rate Your Performance by completing the "Disadvantaged Learner Characteristics Checklist."

VOCABULARY:

Characteristics rating scale: List of criteria representing disadvantaged students for which a vocational teacher rates each criterion on a graduated scale.

Disadvantaged learner: A person (other than a handicapped person) who has academic or economic disadvantages, including a person with limited English speaking ability, and who requires special services, assistance or programs to succeed in vocational education.

Eligibility: Extent to which a student's disadvantagement interferes with successful participation in vocational education.

Local Education Agency (LEA): The immediate administrative and funding school district.

Regular vocational education program: Organized educational programs which are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment or for additional career preparation requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree.

Information Section I

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

The disadvantaged vocational student should be thought of as a learner having special needs. Recognizing the problem areas and strengths of disadvantaged learners is a necessary first step to assessing, planning and implementing vocational programs for these special needs students. Definitions and eligibility criteria for classifying students as disadvantaged are available from local, state and federal education agencies.

The federal definition of disadvantaged learners is: persons (other than handicapped persons) who have academic or economic disadvantages, including persons who have limited English-speaking ability, and who require special services, assistance or programs in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs (Final Rules and Regulations for the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976, Section 104.804, Federal Register, October 3, 1977).

Criteria of academic and economic disadvantages has also been cited by the federal government. A vocational learner with an academic disadvantage is a person who:

(a) lacks reading and writing skills;
(b) lacks mathematical skills; and/or
(c) performs below grade level.

The person with an economic disadvantage:

(a) has a family income at or below the national poverty level;
(b) is unemployed or whose parent(s)/guardian is unemployed;
(c) is receiving public assistance or whose parent is receiving public assistance; and/or
(d) is institutionalized or under State Guardianship.

(Section 104.804, Federal Register, October 3, 1977).

The Maryland State Department of Education further specifies that:

(a) the inability to succeed in a regular vocational program be the basis for identifying the disadvantaged,
(b) individuals, not groups, be so identified,
(c) the inability to succeed be a result of a condition, not the cause, and
(d) the disability is a contributing factor to a lack of success.

Each Local Education Agency (LEA) has been encouraged by the State of Maryland to establish local criteria for identifying disadvantaged secondary school students. Characteristics of consideration are:

(a) level of performance or achievement in language arts and/or math,
(b) poor attendance records,
(c) average for grade placement,
(d) suspension records and
(e) failing grades in vocational education programs and/or required academic subjects.

The identification of disadvantaged learners should be an annual activity. A student who overcomes the disadvantagement during one school year should not need special services the next year and should not be labeled as disadvantaged.

As suggested in the federal definition, disadvantaged persons are not synonymous with handicapped persons. Both groups consist of learners having special needs. The disadvantaged learners have academic and economic special needs, while handicapped learners have mental and physical special needs. Of course, there are disadvantaged persons who may also qualify as being handicapped.

Academic and Economic Characteristics

Federal, state, and local guidelines define disadvantaged learners with emphasis on qualifying characteristics. The vocational teacher should be able to identify the weak and problem areas so that special instruction may be provided. The following paragraphs describe criteria that suggest academic and economic problems of disadvantaged learners. A specific disadvantaged learner may possess one or all of the criteria.

Academic characteristics and examples typical of disadvantaged learners are:

1. Lacks communication skills as exemplified in
   (a) poor reading skills & limited formal vocabulary,
   (b) poor writing skills and/or
   (c) poor oral communication skills.

2. Lacks mathematical skills as exemplified in
   (a) serious difficulties in comprehending computational comments and/or
   (b) insufficient computaticnal skill to compete effectively with peers.

3. Performs below grade level as exemplified in
   (a) reading level at least two grades below grade placement,
   (b) mathematical level at least two grades below grade placement,
   (c) overage for grade by at least two years,
   (d) low achievement scores and/or
   (e) underachievement.

Economic characteristics and examples typical of disadvantaged students are:

1. Family income is at or below national poverty level resulting in
   (a) family funds that are insufficient to meet the needs of today's society and/or
   (b) a major effort is expended in acquiring food, clothing and shelter for survival.

2. Comes from an environment that is detrimental to self-growth as a result of
   (a) being transient/migrant,
   (b) living in a broken home or a home where there is no male authority figure and/or
   (c) lacking encouragement in the home to pursue educational activities.

3. Exhibits poor health characteristics as a result of
   (a) improper nutrition and/or
   (b) improper personal hygiene.

Specific Learning Characteristics

There are also other characteristics or factors that affect learning. Along with problem areas, the vocational teacher should also identify the learner's strengths. The following paragraphs describe both problems and strengths that may affect a disadvantaged student's learning.

Attendance. The disadvantaged student has frequently had a history of poor attendance. When in attendance at school, the learner may not be punctual for classes or even attend all classes. However, when confronted with employability requirements and the opportunity to participate in work experience programs, the disadvantaged learner has improved in school attendance.

Attitudes. In general, a negative attitude toward learning, exhibited as an indifferent and passive role, is taken in the classroom. The disadvantaged person may also reflect unacceptable personality habits that would affect employability. Attitudes are improved when the disadvantaged learner is guided to succeed and then extrinsic or tangible rewards are given as

reinforcement. In addition, an increasing amount of responsibility is generally accepted and used to promote a good working attitude.

Authority. Characteristic of many disadvantaged students is a history of delinquency and a rebellion against authority. The student may defy rules, be suspicious of the vocational teacher, reject supervision, and be overly sensitive to constructive criticism. If the vocational teacher recognizes and is sensitive to the disadvantaged student's needs, strong personal relationships could develop a positive atmosphere for learning.

Goals. Disadvantaged learners tend to have low levels of aspiration and inability to define and solve problems. Difficulty is exhibited with understanding the relationship of school experiences to long range life goals. Additionally, a preference is given to low and high risk situations. On the positive side, the disadvantaged learner will work toward the achievement of employability skills when vocational personnel assist the setting of realistic, performance based objectives.

Image. A negative self-image and a lack of self-confidence is often reflected as a result of continual failure. Apprehensiveness may occur when new learning/training settings are entered. Furthermore, outward defensive verbal expressions may be exhibited. On the other hand, disadvantaged learners express their feelings openly and honestly. These individuals have also shown a willingness to learn when the practical value of the content has been clarified.

Learning Styles. A disadvantaged learner often (a) becomes bored easily, (b) has a short attention span and (c) cannot relate current instruction to previous learning. However, learning does occur when the student's (a) basic needs are satisfied, (b) instruction is structured and organized, (c) real and concrete experiences are provided, (d) a multisensory approach is used, and (e) active involvement in the learning activities is encouraged.

Manual Dexterity. Due to a lack of tools in the home environment, disadvantaged students may have difficulty in coordination, in manipulation of small objects and tools and/or placing and turning movements with hands. However, disadvantaged students are generally very visual and physical oriented.

Social Relations. The disadvantaged student may demonstrate anti-social and anti-school behaviors by associating with socially deviant groups. Acceptance by other individuals is often rejected. Positive attributes include the cooperativeness and mutual aid provided by many families of

disadvantaged students, the collective family or group values held and the perception of equality among group members.

The vocational teacher should use the previous information as a base for identifying disadvantaged students. A characteristics rating scale is included in a later section to assist with describing students that appear to be disadvantaged.

Film Reaction Sheet

CIPHER IN THE SNOW

Directions: After viewing the film, "Cipher in the Snow," write short answers to each question. Then, compare your answers with the appropriate responses identified in the Answer Key.

1. Describe three characteristics of Cliff from an educational viewpoint.

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

2. Identify three factors that contributed to Cliff's demise.

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

3. Comment on this quote, "make him feel like a worthwhile human being" by suggesting three ways for fulfilling this concern.

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

4. What three ways can you gain a better understanding of students like Cliff?

   a. _____

   b. _____

   c. _____

Answer Key -- Film

CIPHER IN THE SNOW

1. Educational characteristics.

   a. no recognition
   b. faded into gackground
   c. failure syndrome
   d. feeling of worthlessness
   e. anonymity
   f. lowered I.Q.
   g. no positive reinforcement

2. Contributing factors.

   a. environment detrimental to self-growth
   b. lacking in basic needs, i.e., food, safety, belongingness
   c. lack of encouragement
   d. viewed as worthless
   e. viewed as not having problems

3. Ways to make student feel worthwhile.

   a. capitalize on strengths
   b. involve student in class activities
   c. pay attention to student
   d. recognize what student does
   e. help student achieve
   f. respect students feelings

4. Ways to gain better understanding.

   a. learn about student's past performance in school
   b. understand student's environment
   c. become involved with student
   d. study student to identify strengths and weaknesses

Test Your Knowledge

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

Directions: Complete each question below by giving short answers. Then compare your answers to the appropriate responses given in the Answer Key.

1. Define the disadvantaged learner according to the federal guidelines. _____

_____

_____

_____

2. List three eligibility criteria for determining academic disadvantagement as stated in the federal guidelines.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. List four eligibility criteria for determining economic disadvantagement as stated in the federal guidelines.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

4. List eight academic problem areas that may characterize a disadvantaged learner.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

h. _____

5. List five economic problem areas that may characterize a disadvantaged learner.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

6. List eight specific factors that may affect the learning of a disadvantaged learner.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

h. _____

7. Describe eight strengths on which the vocational teacher can capitalize to improve the problem areas of disadvantaged learners.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

h. _____

Answer Key - Test Your Knowledge

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

1. Definition: Persons (other than handicapped persons) who have academic or economic disadvantages, including persons who have limited English speaking ability and who require special services, assistance or programs in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs.

2. Academic:

   (a) lacks reading and writing skills;
   (b) lacks mathematical skills and/or
   (c) performs below grade level

3. Economic:

   (a) family income is at or below national poverty level;
   (b) participant or parent(s) or guardian of the participant is unemployed;
   (c) participant or parent of participant is receiving public assistance; and/or
   (d) the participant is institutionalized or under State Guardianship.

4. Academic problem areas:

   (a) Poor reading skills & limited formal vocabulary
   (b) Poor writing skills
   (c) Poor oral communication skills
   (d) Is unable to comprehend math concepts
   (e) Is unable to perform simple math
   (f) Reading level at least two grades below grade placement
   (g) Mathematical ability is at least two grades below grade placement
   (h) Overage for grade by at least two years
   (i) Low achievement scores
   (j) Underachievement

5. Economic problem areas:

   (a) Funds that are insufficient to meet family needs
   (b) Major effort spent on survival
   (c) Transient/migrant
   (d) Broken home or home without father figure
   (e) Lack of educational encouragement
   (f) Improper nutrition
   (g) Improper personal hygiene

6. Problem areas that affect learning:

(a) Poor attendance
(b) Negative attitudes
(c) Delinquency and rebellion against authority
(d) Low levels of aspiration (goals)
(e) Negative self-image and lack of self-confidence
(f) Difference in learning styles
(g) Difficulty with manual dexterity
(h) Socially deviant behavior

7. Strengths of disadvantaged learners:

(a) Relates to attendance required for employment
(b) Accepts positive extrinsic reinforcement
(c) Accepts additional responsibility
(d) Capable of forming strong personal relationships
(e) Relates to realistic, performance based objectives
(f) Expresses feelings openly and honestly
(g) Shows willingness to learn
(h) Needs structure and organization
(i) Relates to concrete experiences
(j) Has visual and physical orientation
(k) Experiences cooperative family relationships
(l) Possesses collective group values
(m) Perceives equality among group members

Worksheet I

DEFINITION AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA COMPARISON

Directions: Write the definition and eligibility criteria of the disadvantaged learner for your Local Education Agency (LEA). Then describe the differences between the LEA and federal guidelines.

LEA Definition:

LEA Eligibility Criteria:

LEA and Federal Definition and Eligibility Criteria Differences:

Worksheet II

DISADVANTAGED LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS RATING SCALE

Directions: Select and observe a learner that appears to be disadvantaged. Then rate each criterion to indicate the amount of influence on success in the vocational program. Circle a number for each criterion according to the following:

1 = disadvantage that interferes with success in vocational program
2 = disadvantage that does not prevent success in vocational program
3 = not applicable, neither a disadvantage nor a strength
4 = strength that moderately encourages success in vocational program
5 = strength that promotes success in vocational program

Additional comments may be written at the end of the rating scale.

ACADEMIC	Disadvantage				Strength
READING (Reading ability and formal vocabulary)					
1. Reading vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
2. Reading speed	1	2	3	4	5
3. Comprehension of written lesson	1	2	3	4	5
4. Understanding of lesson vocabulary definitions	1	2	3	4	5
5. Grade level of reading	1	2	3	4	5
WRITING (Written communication)					
1. Expression of thoughts in writing	1	2	3	4	5
2. Construction of a sentence	1	2	3	4	5
SPEAKING (Oral communication)					
1. Pronunciation of words	1	2	3	4	5
2. Length of responses to questions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Willingness to speak	1	2	3	4	5
4. Use of formal language	1	2	3	4	5
5. Transition from native language to English	1	2	3	4	5
COMPUTING (Mathematical skills)					
1. Recognition of mathematical symbols	1	2	3	4	5
2. Comprehension of computational comments	1	2	3	4	5
3. Performance of simple math	1	2	3	4	5
4. Application of mathematical formulas to classroom vocational problems	1	2	3	4	5
5. Grade level of computing	1	2	3	4	5

	Disadvantage				Strength
GENERAL ACHIEVEMENT (Grade level of performance)					
1. Relationship of age to grade	1	2	3	4	5
2. Level of achievement scores	1	2	3	4	5
ECONOMIC					
INCOME (Economic assistance)					
1. Income of family	1	2	3	4	5
2. Employment of parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Institutionalization of student	1	2	3	4	5
HOME ENVIRONMENT (Environment for self-growth)					
1. Transient/migrant	1	2	3	4	5
2. Member of a broken home	1	2	3	4	5
3. Home without male authority figure	1	2	3	4	5
4. Encouragement at home to pursue vocational education	1	2	3	4	5
5. Availability of transportation facilities	1	2	3	4	5
6. Dependable day care for learner's child (children)	1	2	3	4	5
7. Care of siblings	1	2	3	4	5
8. Nutritional habits	1	2	3	4	5
9. Personal hygiene	1	2	3	4	5
SPECIFIC LEARNING FACTORS					
ATTENDANCE (Absenteeism)					
1. Amount of absenteeism)	1	2	3	4	5
2. Punctuality to classes	1	2	3	4	5
ATTITUDE (Learning values)					
1. Interest in learning and school work	1	2	3	4	5
2. Role in class	1	2	3	4	5
3. Personality habits	1	2	3	4	5
4. Awareness of educational procedures and opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
5. Achievement of simple tasks	1	2	3	4	5
6. Acceptance of responsibility	1	2	3	4	5

	Disadvantage				Strength
AUTHORITY (Relationships with authority figures)					
1. Rapport with teacher	1	2	3	4	5
2. Rapport with school administrators and supervisors	1	2	3	4	5
3. Rapport with employers	1	2	3	4	5
GOALS (Short and long term objectives)					
1. Level of aspiration	1	2	3	4	5
2. Understanding of relationship between school and long range goals	1	2	3	4	5
3. Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
4. Preference for high and low risks	1	2	3	4	5
5. Perseverance in achieving goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. Achievement of performance based objectives	1	2	3	4	5
IMAGE (Self-image and self-concept)					
1. Self-confidence	1	2	3	4	5
2. Expression of feelings	1	2	3	4	5
3. Willingness to learn	1	2	3	4	5
LEARNING STYLE (Avenues for learning)					
1. Attention span	1	2	3	4	5
2. Transfer of knowledge and skills	1	2	3	4	5
3. Responds to structure and organization	1	2	3	4	5
4. Learns through real and concrete experiences	1	2	3	4	5
5. Learns by doing	1	2	3	4	5
MANUAL DEXTERITY (Proficiency in manipulating)					
1. Coordination	1	2	3	4	5
2. Manipulation of small objects and tools	1	2	3	4	5
3. Performance of placing and turning movements with hands	1	2	3	4	5
4. Visual and physical orientation	1	2	3	4	5

	Disadvantage				Strength
SOCIAL RELATIONS (Social behavior)					
1. Association with peer groups	1	2	3	4	5
2. Relationships with adults	1	2	3	4	5
3. Cooperativeness of family members	1	2	3	4	5
4. Social values	1	2	3	4	5

Comments: _____

Worksheet III

DISADVANTAGED LEARNER DESCRIPTION

Directions: Write a brief narrative description of a disadvantaged learner using the data collected on the Disadvantaged Learner Characteristics Rating Scale. The description should be (a) clear and concise, (b) objective, (c) verifiable through documentation, (d) free of libelous terms and (e) limited to repeatable behaviors.

Description of disadvantages: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Description of strengths: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Rate Your Performance

DISADVANTAGED LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS CHECKLIST

Directions: Rate the following criteria for identifying characteristics of the disadvantaged. Check (✓) the appropriate category. All items must receive an acceptable rating. If an item is unacceptable, repeat any activities that are necessary to permit an acceptable rating.

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Definition and Eligiblity Criteria Comparison		
1. Authoritative sources are contacted.	____	____
2. LEA definition of disadvantaged is written.	____	____
3. LEA eligibility criteria for disadvantaged is written.	____	____
4. LEA and federal definition of disadvantaged is differentiated.	____	____
Disadvantaged Learner Characteristics Rating Scale		
5. One learner was selected and observed.	____	____
6. All characteristics are considered.	____	____
7. Characteristics are rated objectively.	____	____
8. Each characteristic is rated according to its influence on the learner's success in the vocational program.	____	____
9. Ratings of 1 and 2 indicate disadvantages of the learner.	____	____
10. Ratings of 3 indicate no application to success in the vocational program.	____	____
11. Ratings of 4 and 5 indicate strengths of the learner.	____	____

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Disadvantaged Learner Description		
12. Disadvantaged Learner Description is based on findings from the characteristics checklist.	____	____
13. Description reflects disadvantages of the learner.	____	____
14. Description reflects strengths of the learner.	____	____
15. Description is written in clear and concise paragraphs.	____	____
16. Description is objective.	____	____
17. Description is free of libelous terms.	____	____
18. Behaviors described are repeatable.	____	____